

P 241528Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5056
INFO SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY

UNCLAS GABORONE 000511

DEPT. FOR AF/S, AF/RSA, OFDA
PRETORIA FOR USAID
USAFRICOM FOR STRATEGY PLANS AND PROGRAMS (MC) SOUTHERN
BRANCH

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: BC PGOV PREF ZI
SUBJECT: BOTSWANA PREPARES FOR HORDES OF ZIMBABWEAN ASYLUM
SEEKERS

REF: GABORONE 470

¶1. The Office of the President organized a fact-finding trip to Francistown and environs June 15-17 to familiarize members of the diplomatic community with their plans to process and care for potentially thousands of Zimbabweans fleeing the violence in their country. Those participating were myself, the British High Commissioner, staff from the German and French Embassies, the UNHCR Representative based in Gaborone and the UNHCR Representative for Humanitarian Assistance based in Harare. The diplomats were selected on the basis that we have citizens in Zimbabwe who may need assistance. Per reftel, the Government of Botswana has told us that we may do whatever we need to do to assist our citizens, including bringing in military aircraft.

¶2. By BDF helicopters, we traveled first to Dukwe Refugee camp, about 140 km north west of Francistown, where approximately 500 Zimbabwean refugees have been screened and admitted since April 1. They are being housed in tents provided by the Government of Botswana and the UNHCR. There are plans to expand the tent city as needed with water pipes and latrines being installed as we visited. The director of the camp said that the long-time residents-- mostly Namibians, Angolans and Somalis -- are welcoming the Zimbabweans, and the children have been assimilated easily into the school.

¶3. We then traveled to three of the seven "reception centers" located along the Botswana/Zimbabwe border. There the potential refugees will be screened, fed and given a place to sleep for up to 72 hours. They will then be transferred to the Center for Illegal Immigrants in Francistown or the Dukwe camp. The reception centers are in the process of being set up, and will have tents, mattresses, latrines or flush toilets and showers for the staff and asylum seekers. Food will also be provided for the Zimbabweans, since those who have already come across were described as exhausted and very hungry, with some having suffered beatings and torture. The reception centers have been located no closer than 40 km from the border with Zimbabwe, since many still remember the 1970s when troops from the apartheid regime in Southern Rhodesia raided and killed a number of Zimbabweans and Batswana in camps near the border.

¶4. The reception centers have all been organized by the District Disaster Committees, made up of local representatives of government agencies and NGOs such as the Red Cross. We were all impressed with how much has been done in just a few weeks, and how well they are working as a team. While they seem to have sufficient resources to meet the needs of the current influx, if thousands of Zimbabweans stream across the border in the future, they will certainly need help. I have asked my staff to work with the OFDA representative in Pretoria to have a request for \$50,000 in disaster assistance ready to go should the GOB request it.

CANAVAN